

Tularemia infection surge prompts warning, especially for Minnesota cat owners

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An increase in tularemia infections in Minnesota animals prompted a warning from state health officials, particularly to cat owners, who could get sick if their pets get infected and scratch or bite them.

Only 21 cases were found in animals last year, but that tripled the usual total, according to an alert issued Thursday by the Minnesota Department of Health. Seven cases have already been reported in 2024.

The increase could be because of increased awareness and testing, but veterinarians are noting symptoms such as [high fever](#), swelling and skin sores in untested animals as well, said Maria Bye, a senior state health epidemiologist for [zoonotic diseases](#).

"It's important for pet owners to be aware of this disease in their pets because it is possible for a person to become infected as well," Bye said.

Tularemia is not spread person to person, so the six or fewer human cases in Minnesota each year usually result from animal bites or scratches, or tick or fly bites.

Squirrels, rabbits and mice are common carriers of *Francisella tularensis*, the bacteria that causes the disease. Minnesota recorded one unusual case this month: a Hennepin County resident became infected after running a [lawn mower](#) over a dead animal and breathing in the aerosolized bacteria.

High fever and other symptoms typically emerge in people three to five days after exposure.

The Health Department urged Minnesotans to protect themselves by avoiding contact with [wild animals](#) and wearing tick repellent outdoors. Pet owners should consider medication for their pets to ward off tick bites and prevent their cats from going outdoors and hunting small animals.

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